

Good morning. Today the Subcommittee conducts oversight on the U.S. military's newest combatant command, AFRICOM.

While this hearing is the Subcommittee's first public discussion on this important topic, it represents a year-long, bipartisan investigation that included asking the Government Accountability Office to analyze the stand-up of AFRICOM, which is to reach full operating capability just a few short months from now by September 30, 2008.

I would like to thank Ranking Member Shays and your staff for joining us in this important oversight effort.

Today, we centrally ask the question, "What is AFRICOM"? One might think that this should be a fairly simple, straightforward question. That turns out, however, not to be so.

The GAO's testimony includes an interesting passage, and I quote:

State Department officials said that they had difficulty in responding to African concerns [about AFRICOM] because of their own confusion over AFRICOM's intended mission and goals.

Today's hearing attempts – for policymakers, for the American public, and even for our own government representatives throughout Africa – to try to bring some clarity here, or, at the least, to ask the right questions.

What is clear is that AFRICOM will bring three existing commands with responsibilities for parts of Africa into one Africa-centric command. AFRICOM's geographic jurisdiction has been carved from CENTCOM (which focused on the Horn of Africa and other eastern regions of the continent), the U.S. Pacific Command (which focused on Madagascar), and the U.S. European Command, EUCOM (which focused on the rest of western and southern Africa).

As a result, AFRICOM will oversee U.S. military relationships, activities, and interests throughout Africa, with the sole exception of Egypt, which will remain under the auspices of CENTCOM.

Significant government initiatives such as the establishment of a new combatant command raise important Congressional oversight questions, for example, about the continuity of operations, right-sizing necessary infrastructure and personnel, and sound stewardship of taxpayer funds. And we'll explore these issues at today's hearing.

But AFRICOM presents additional questions during a post-Cold War, post-9/11 environment in which we continue to grapple with the "asymmetric" threats of terrorism and potential breeding grounds in ungoverned spaces. We also have a continent that, too often, has been wracked by poverty, disease, and war. In fact, Africa includes more than two-thirds of all the world's HIV-positive population, including some militaries with rates as high as 50 percent.

Last November, Defense Secretary Robert Gates delivered a remarkable lecture in which he recognized that, and I quote,

these new threats require our government to operate as a whole differently – to act with unity, agility, and creativity. And they will require considerably more resources devoted to America's non-military instruments of power.

Early Administration rhetoric envisioned AFRICOM as a transformational experiment providing a whole-of-government, interagency approach to U.S. national security strategy. Some of this initial vision remains, including adding a State Department foreign service officer as one of its two deputy commanders. We'll hear from Ambassador Yates in just a few minutes.

However – and this is something we will also explore in today's hearing – it appears that ambitions for AFRICOM have been scaled back, apparently because of: 1) concerns by the State Department, USAID, and others about a military lead in areas of diplomacy and international development; 2) African governments' neo-colonial concerns about a prominent U.S. military presence on the continent; and 3) non-governmental organizations' concerns about the potential militarization of foreign aid and humanitarian assistance.

So, with that backdrop in mind, AFRICOM presents a number of additional oversight questions, some of which are AFRICOM-specific and some of which point to broader, fundamental questions of how the United States should organize itself to maximize our foreign policy and national security interests.

In the spirit of constructive oversight, I want to highlight a few of these questions that will be on my mind as we begin to hear from this panel of dedicated public servants from both the executive and legislative branches of our government:

What is the strategic vision driving the creation of AFRICOM? How has that vision evolved over time? Who will be at the table as this vision continues to be developed?

What are the current and future missions planned for AFRICOM? Some refer to AFRICOM as a combatant command “plus” – what is the plus? What type of soft-power mandate does AFRICOM have? What kinds of so-called “phase zero” operations – that is, those aimed at building and maintaining a stable security environment – will AFRICOM undertake?

What is the status and plan for interagency staffing in AFRICOM? Where will it be in October of this year? What is the ultimate goal?

How will the interagency work within AFRICOM, as well as among AFRICOM and the State Department, USAID, other government departments, and the various, bilateral embassy country teams throughout Africa?

What are AFRICOM’s future plans for the U.S. military footprint in Africa?

How is AFRICOM going to interact with non-governmental organizations that are involved in humanitarian and development work?

How will AFRICOM interact with Africans and African nations themselves?

And, one final question that really goes to my colleagues as much as our panel:

To the extent that AFRICOM is not going to be – or is simply not the right model for – a “whole of government” approach to national security strategy, what is the right model, platform, and government structures required to achieve that “unity, agility, and creativity” echoed recently by Secretary Gates.

I look forward to our discussion.